

Last Sunday the Verona Area High School held commencement ceremonies for its nearly 400 graduates. Approximately 30 minutes prior to the beginning of those ceremonies, District administration was informed of a student who wished to wear an eagle feather as a part of their graduation wardrobe. Given the lack of time to research this matter; that all students had been informed previously including at rehearsal held the Thursday prior to graduation that no modifications, adornments etc. could be made to mortar boards and; no policy or mechanism currently exists that would permit other students to make similar requests regarding other regalia, this request was denied.

We have since learned that the eagle feather has significant cultural and religious meaning to Native peoples. Many tribes award an eagle feather upon graduation from high school to signify the importance of this milestone and honor the graduate and his / her family.

The mission of the Verona Area School District is that Every Child Must Succeed, a promise we make that spans from day one to final day. It will never be the intent or deliberate practice of the Verona Area School District to discriminate against any person or group of people. Adequate advance notice of this request with time to discuss and research would have likely resulted in a different decision on this matter. Nevertheless, one of our graduates' final experience in our school district was negative when it should have been joyous. For that we are sorry.

As we have many different cultures and religions represented in our student body, there are likely other considerations for graduation regalia we are not currently aware of and will need to review going forward. If a process is developed that students can request such exceptions to the graduation attire, we want that process to be available to all students. We will take up this matter as a policy discussion prior to the 2018 – 2019 graduation ceremonies.